

SMITH

BY HAROLD F. BARBER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

F. CONRAD FAXON



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SMITH

Smith had come over from New York on a hurried business trip, and had become hopelessly lost in Boston's tortuous highways, resulting in his accomplishing only about half of a good day's work, and remarking with feeling and point, "This is the darnedest town I ever saw," retired to rest, thoroughly weary and disgusted. He told me so, when I met him about a year afterward.

In the meantime, other business trips being necessary, Smith had become sufficiently posted to be able to accomplish his calls without too much waste of time, and in consequence had wandered about somewhat, after the evening meal. He had been surprised at attending a Pop Concert by the Boston Symphony Orchestra to find a glorified beer garden combined with a "highbrow" musical atmosphere and the clothes of the horse show; he had discovered for himself that he could not saunter more than two minutes from one certain spot and find any "bright lights;" he had become thoroughly conversant with the fact that Boston is the only place where streets

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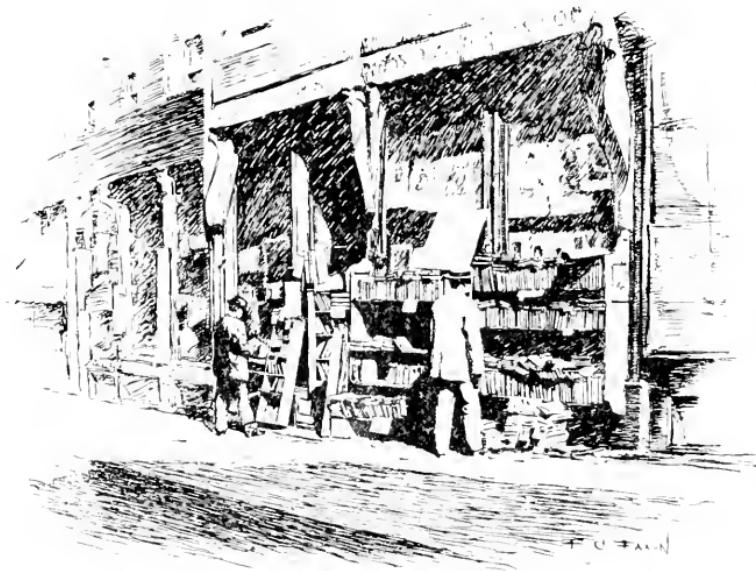
run only one way; and after getting thoroughly into his mind that it was useless to try and take a street car anywhere in the business district, had become not only somewhat accustomed to Boston's ways, but actually looked forward to the next trip with almost pleasurable feelings — not that he would admit it, O no! But Boston was "tolerable;" and the truth was that he dimly felt he would discover some new and interesting idiosyncrasy of the old town.

And so, one day I met Smith. "Say, some roads you've got about here," said he. "Brown took me out in his car last night and we took a spin out Commonwealth Avenue to that summer theater you've got on the river — ten miles right from the heart of the city, with a great road all the way." We were walking down dear old Cornhill at the time, where the old bookstores are; old Cornhill, which can't keep straight, though only about 150 yards long, and to save elbowing our way through the Washington Street crowds, we turned into that system of alleys which takes you

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half a mile through the busiest part of the city, never more than half a block or so from Washington Street.

"Say, where are you taking me to?" said Smith. "Right to City Hall," said I, "by



"Dear old Cornhill, where the old book-stores are."

direct route as the crow flies. Not Commonwealth Avenue, and an auto couldn't travel here, but it's mighty convenient all the same."

However, it being a warm day, after passing Young's Hotel we turned aside a few steps; and glancing at the old tavern sign with the date "1795," we entered

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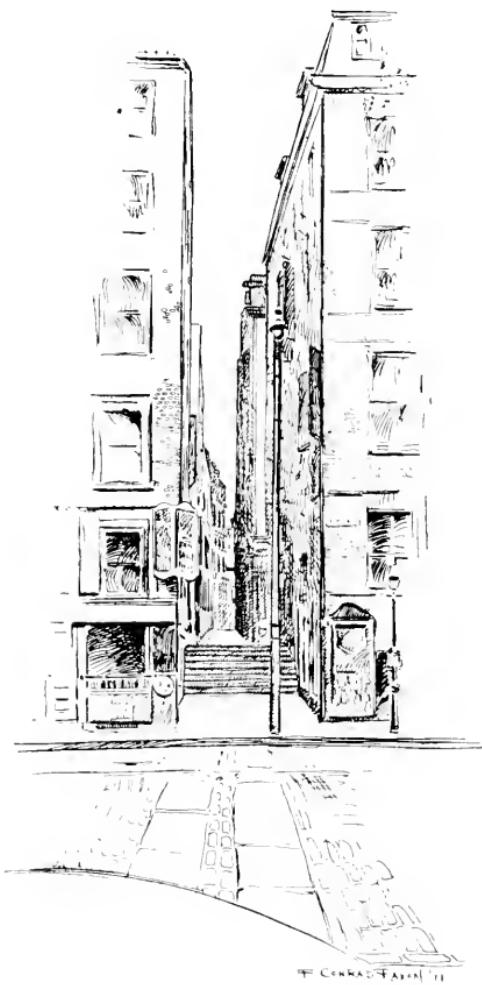
over the sawdust-strewn floor and ordered each a "half-mug" brought to us at a bare old table, scoured smooth and gray with age. Peace was here. No one hurried, neither the drawers, nor the patrons, and least of all the waiters, in their long white aprons. Brown and smoky were the ceilings, brown and discolored the sporting prints of fifty years ago which adorned the walls, and dented were the pewter mugs—but the ale was cool and sparkling; and talk flourishing in such an atmosphere, Smith opened his mouth and spake:

"This town gets me," said he. "It isn't like any new town, and it isn't like any old town; there doesn't seem to be any other place like it."

"Well, Smith, it's a secret, this charm of old Boston, but I'll let you in on it. You spoke of Commonwealth Avenue just as we turned into the alley, and we're not 100 feet from Young's Hotel or the City Hall now, though you wouldn't imagine there was such a thing as a trolley car, or an elevator, or a telephone in existence in this old-time ale-house. You

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may have your shoes shined in Spring Lane, where the Town Pump stood 250 years ago, and throw an orange against



"Half a mile through the busiest part of the city, never more than half a block from Washington Street."

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the Post Office. When we leave here, in less than half a minute we'll be out in the glare and rush of Newspaper Row—we shouldered past a great load of paper for the Post when we entered the door; as we crossed Court Street you remarked the Old Court House apparently being used for nothing but a background for a news-stand; don't you see, man, it's the contrasts. Boston is the fifth city in the country, the center of almost 1,500,000 people, and yet the city itself is condensed into a smaller space than would seem possible. The quaint old things are here, and the modern innovations are here, all crowded in together. Just so with the people and the institutions and the habits of mind — everywhere you meet contrasts. Think over the really interesting people you know, and see if they're not made up of strangely contradictory characteristics. Isn't it so? It may be that these people seem more contradictory because, being positive, each quality is emphasized; but however that is, the fact seems to hold. And the same laws apply to communities as to individuals.

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"Look about and just notice the contrasts you will see in old Boston. You may not mistake the dome of the Chris-



"Glancing at the old tavern sign with the date '1795'
we shouldered past a great load of paper as we entered."

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tian Science Church for the dome of the State House as did an aviator who flew up from Squantum, but you can't help noticing the *uncommonness* of the Common, where hundreds play baseball in the heart of the city, with busy commerce and smart shops the width of the street away. You can't miss the largest office building in the city, built completely around the Old South Church, its eleven white stories making a most striking background for the simple architecture of the smoke-begrimed old church."

Smith is really quite sensible—"I believe you're right," said he.

And so, after that, whenever I see Smith, he tells me what new features he's noticed about Boston's contrasts, and he's really getting quite cracked on the subject.

At first he mentioned such commonplaces as King's Chapel seeming out of place with the City Hall behind it, a department store in front of it, and a large hotel opposite, not to mention the vendors of post-cards who throng its sacred precincts; or how queer St. Paul's looks

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"A striking background for the simple architecture
of the smoke-begrimed old church."

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right in the midst of bustling Tremont Street, with its giant columns black with time.

One night he dined and wined at ridiculously small expense in an Italian restaurant, while Italian operatic airs were sung by a tenor of real Italian quality, and was surprised to find that this coast of Bohemia was within ten feet of the Parker House.

The next day one of his customers took him to lunch at a glorified lunch counter, where they sat upon little stools amid sumptuous surroundings, and where the most toothsome delicacies were placed before them with miraculous speed by the most attractive of young women; and he found the prices far higher than at the cafe of the operatic airs. On the way from lunch to take a train, Smith's eye, being now somewhat trained to observation, spied a more lowly "beanery" which announced its location and business by large wooden representations of the indigenous bean-pot and the sacred cod fish.

I came across him one afternoon on

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Tremont Street, gazing through the iron fence of Old Granary Burying Ground. He seemed lost in contemplation of the stillness within the enclosure — it was winter and already dark, and the sparrows had ceased their twitter, while the hurrying crowds of the rush-hour brushed by him subway-bent. I had to speak twice before he heard me. Then we stepped over to the subway together and fought our way through the crush to our car, and of course had to stand. Going out, he told me of his latest observations. "Say, did you ever notice these subway stations? They look like the offspring of the Public Library." "That's so," I agreed, "and you've heard of the Englishman who inquired the way to the North Station and wanted to punch the man who courteously directed him to go 'down in the tunnel and take the Elevated?'"

"Well," said Smith, "I was strolling down Columbus Avenue one night about a couple of months ago, and about every third door was a little cafe, some smaller and some larger, but there were lights

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and music all the way. I've never been to Paris, but it reminded me of things I've read about the cafes on the boulevards there. Well, I was riding down the Avenue on a car today, and do you know, all the way down, every time I looked up, there was Park Street Church in the distance across the Common exactly in the middle of the street," "Yes," said I, "and have you noticed how high that steeple looks as you come out of the vaudeville theatre in the little street just opposite the church? That picture theater used to be the Boston Music Hall, you know.

"And by the way, have you run across the old tavern yet where much beer is consumed over little marble-topped tables, and where you may look past the faces of the women at the Landing of the Pilgrims, with John Alden and Priscilla and the rest, painted on the walls?" "No," said he, "you must take me there; but I've been wondering how the spirit of old Paul Revere down at the Old North Church likes the smell of garlic and spaghetti."



"How the steeple looks as you come out of the
vaudeville theatre...that used to be
the Boston Music Hall."

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After a ride of about a mile we alighted at the edge of the Fenway, the Desert in the City, where the eye sweeps broadly over a wide tract of stark streets, park land, and creeping water, broken along the edge by educational oases. "And just see what we left a mile away!" said Smith. "Why, the corner of Washington and Winter Streets is worse than a cane rush." "Well, Smith, have you been up to Beacon Hill, say Mt. Vernon Street, which isn't five minutes walk from the 'cane rush?' Up there it's like a mossy glade in a forest, for quiet peace, dignity, and a general air of having always been there. And then continue over the hill for a couple of blocks and you'll realize that Boston is 'The Darkies' Africa.' "

And then, all of a sudden without warning, Smith did a regrettable thing. He smote me upon the back and exclaimed, "Say, old man, why don't you jot down a few of these queer things? They'd make good reading, and I want you to do it." So blame Smith.

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